

## CHECKLIST ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

**Project Name:** Hilger Valley Staging Area  
**Proposed Implementation Date:** January 2018  
**Proponent:** NorthWestern Energy  
**Location:** Section 16, T13N, R4W  
**County:** Lewis and Clark  
**Trust:** Common Schools

### I. TYPE AND PURPOSE OF ACTION

The NorthWestern Energy is proposing to access and utilize ten acres of rangeland on Section 16, T13N, R4W as a storage area of construction materials, line construction equipment, and parking of heavy equipment.

### II. PROJECT DEVELOPMENT

#### 1. PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT, AGENCIES, GROUPS OR INDIVIDUALS CONTACTED:

Agencies, Groups or Individuals Scoped:	Response:
NorthWestern Energy	Proponent-in favor
DNRC, Landowner	Landowner-neutral
Sieben Ranch	Lessee/Adjacent Landowner-settlement agreement reached

#### 2. OTHER GOVERNMENTAL AGENCIES WITH JURISDICTION, LIST OF PERMITS NEEDED:

DNRC is not aware of other government agencies with jurisdiction. The proponent is responsible to obtain any necessary permits.

#### 3. ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED:

**Proposed Action Alternative:** Issuing the Land Use License as proposed to authorize the storage area.

**No Action Alternative:** Deny the Land Use License application as proposed to authorize the storage area.

### III. IMPACTS ON THE PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

- *RESOURCES potentially impacted are listed on the form, followed by common issues that would be considered.*
- *Explain POTENTIAL IMPACTS AND MITIGATIONS following each resource heading.*
- *Enter "NONE" if no impacts are identified or the resource is not present.*

#### 4. GEOLOGY AND SOIL QUALITY, STABILITY AND MOISTURE:

*Consider the presence of fragile, compactable or unstable soils. Identify unusual geologic features. Specify any special reclamation considerations. Identify any cumulative impacts to soils.*

Soils in the project area include 34B—Sieben gravelly loam (99.9%) and 433E—Crago-Musselshell gravelly loams (0.1%). 99.9% of the soils are slightly susceptible to erosion hazards which indicates that erosion is unlikely.

**Proposed Action Alternative:** Disturbance will occur during the staging of materials and equipment. No long-lasting impacts to fragile, compactable, or unstable soils or any unusual geologic features are anticipated. Standard LUL stipulations would address reclamation and the proponent will be required to seed the disturbed area with a seed mix recommended by DNRC staff.

**No Action Alternative:** No impacts to the geology or soil characteristics would occur.

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## 5. WATER QUALITY, QUANTITY AND DISTRIBUTION:

*Identify important surface or groundwater resources. Consider the potential for violation of ambient water quality standards, drinking water maximum contaminant levels, or degradation of water quality. Identify cumulative effects to water resources.*

Little Prickly Pear Creek is adjacent to the project area. However, no impacts to the water quality, quantity and distribution will occur. Standard LUL stipulations would address reclamation.

**Proposed Action Alternative:** No direct or cumulative impacts to water quality are anticipated as a result of the proposed action.

**No Action Alternative:** No impacts to the water quality, quantity, and/or distribution will occur.

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## 6. AIR QUALITY:

*What pollutants or particulate would be produced? Identify air quality regulations or zones (e.g. Class I air shed) the project would influence. Identify cumulative effects to air quality.*

In general, this area is considered to be of high quality air standards with good ventilation and would not be affected by the proposal.

**Proposed Action Alternative:** Short-duration increases in dust from activities associated the proposed staffing area activities will occur. Minimal direct or cumulative effects are expected to occur to air quality as a result of the proposed action.

**No Action Alternative:** No impacts to air quality will occur.

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## 7. VEGETATION COVER, QUANTITY AND QUALITY:

*What changes would the action cause to vegetative communities? Consider rare plants or cover types that would be affected. Identify cumulative effects to vegetation.*

The Montana Natural Heritage Program lists 1 plant species of concern, 0 potential species of concern, and 0 special status species within T13N R4W. The plant species of concern is Divide Bladderpod.

**"Species Occurrences verified in these Counties:** Broadwater, Lewis and Clark, Meagher  
**State Rank Reason:** State endemic restricted to central-Montana with the majority of populations occurring in the Big Belt Mountains and extending north to the southern end of the Rocky Mountain Front. Many large populations exist and the species typically occurs on gravelly slopes that are not usually subject to human disturbance."

**Proposed Action Alternative:** Temporary disturbances to plant communities may occur. These vegetative communities would not be permanently altered. No lasting impacts to rare plants or cover types are anticipated within the project area. Standard LUL stipulations would address reclamation and the proponent will be required to seed the disturbed area with a seed mix recommended by DNRC staff.

**No Action Alternative:** No impacts to the vegetation cover, quantity, and/or quality will occur.

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#### **8. TERRESTRIAL, AVIAN AND AQUATIC LIFE AND HABITATS:**

*Consider substantial habitat values and use of the area by wildlife, birds or fish. Identify cumulative effects to fish and wildlife.*

This tract is used by a variety of wildlife, including ungulates (mule deer, whitetail deer, and elk), small to large sized predators (weasels, skunks, red fox, wolves and coyotes), numerous species of small mammals (mice, voles, ground squirrels, rabbits, etc.), various raptors (red-tailed hawks, golden eagles, bald eagles, American kestrels, prairie falcons, etc.) upland game birds (Hungarian partridge, mountain grouse), and numerous non-game bird species (a wide variety of migrant and resident bird species associated with available habitats). The proposed project would temporarily displace these wildlife species.

**Proposed Action Alternative:** Temporary disturbances may occur during the proposed project duration. No lasting impacts to terrestrial, avian, and/or aquatic life and/or habitats are anticipated.

**No Action Alternative:** No impacts to terrestrial, avian, and/or aquatic life and habitats will occur.

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#### **9. UNIQUE, ENDANGERED, FRAGILE OR LIMITED ENVIRONMENTAL RESOURCES:**

*Consider any federally listed threatened or endangered species or habitat identified in the project area. Determine effects to wetlands. Consider Sensitive Species or Species of special concern. Identify cumulative effects to these species and their habitat.*

The Montana Natural Heritage Program lists 5 animal *species of concern*, 0 *potential species of concern* and *special status species* within this township. The 5 animal species of concern are: Black-tailed Prairie Dog, Fisher, Evening Grosbeak, Clark's Nutcracker, Sage Thrasher. The area wildlife would be affected by temporary displacement during proposed project.

**Proposed Action Alternative:** Temporary disturbances may occur during the proposed project duration. No lasting impacts to unique, endangered, fragile, or limited environmental resources habitats are anticipated.

**No Action Alternative:** No impacts to unique, endangered, fragile, or limited environmental resources will occur.

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#### **10. HISTORICAL AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITES:**

*Identify and determine effects to historical, archaeological or paleontological resources.*

A Class I (literature review) level review was conducted by the DNRC staff archaeologist for the area of potential effect (APE). This entailed inspection of project maps, DNRC's sites/site leads database, land use records, General Land Office Survey Plats, and control cards. The Class I search revealed that no cultural or paleontological resources have been identified in the APE. No additional archaeological investigative work will be conducted in response to this proposed development. However, if previously unknown cultural or paleontological materials are identified during project related activities, all work will cease until a professional assessment of such resources can be made.

**Proposed Action Alternative:** No impacts to historical, archeological, and/or paleontological resources are anticipated due to the scope and nature of this project.

**No Action Alternative:** No impacts to historical, archeological, and/or paleontological resources will occur.

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#### **11. AESTHETICS:**

*Determine if the project is located on a prominent topographic feature, or may be visible from populated or scenic areas. What level of noise, light or visual change would be produced? Identify cumulative effects to aesthetics.*

The proposed project area represents a typical rural community found in this geographic area in Lewis and Clark County, Montana. The project would have minimal impacts to the area's aesthetics. Noise and dust increases would occur during the project. These impacts would cease as soon as the project is completed.

**Proposed Action Alternative:** No impacts to the aesthetics are anticipated.

**No Action Alternative:** No impacts to the aesthetics will occur.

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**12. DEMANDS ON ENVIRONMENTAL RESOURCES OF LAND, WATER, AIR OR ENERGY:**

*Determine the amount of limited resources the project would require. Identify other activities nearby that the project would affect. Identify cumulative effects to environmental resources.*

The area does not contain limited resources. Nearby activities consist mostly of farming and ranching operations.

**Proposed Action Alternative** No impacts to the demands of environmental resources such as land, water, air, and/or energy resources are anticipated.

**No Action Alternative:** No impacts to the demands of environmental resources such as land, water, air, and/or energy resources will occur.

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**13. OTHER ENVIRONMENTAL DOCUMENTS PERTINENT TO THE AREA:**

*List other studies, plans or projects on this tract. Determine cumulative impacts likely to occur as a result of current private, state or federal actions in the analysis area, and from future proposed state actions in the analysis area that are under MEPA review (scoped) or permitting review by any state agency.*

DNRC is not aware of other plans or projects in the area.

**Proposed Action Alternative:** No impacts to studies, plans, and/or projects pertinent to this area are anticipated to occur.

**No Action Alternative:** No impacts to studies, plans, and/or projects will occur.

IV. IMPACTS ON THE HUMAN POPULATION
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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <i>RESOURCES potentially impacted are listed on the form, followed by common issues that would be considered.</i></li><li>• <i>Explain POTENTIAL IMPACTS AND MITIGATIONS following each resource heading.</i></li><li>• <i>Enter "NONE" if no impacts are identified or the resource is not present.</i></li></ul> |
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**14. HUMAN HEALTH AND SAFETY:**

*Identify any health and safety risks posed by the project.*

The proposed project would create human health and/or safety risks associated with using the area to stage the materials and equipment necessary for electrical pole replacement.

**Proposed Action Alternative:** The proponent is responsible to identify and mitigate the risks associated with the pole removal.

**No Action Alternative:** No impacts to human health and/or safety risks will occur.

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**15. INDUSTRIAL, COMMERCIAL AND AGRICULTURE ACTIVITIES AND PRODUCTION:**

*Identify how the project would add to or alter these activities.*

**Proposed Action Alternative:** No lasting impacts to industrial, commercial and agricultural activities/production are anticipated.

**No Action Alternative:** No impacts to industrial, commercial and agricultural activities/production will occur.

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**16. QUANTITY AND DISTRIBUTION OF EMPLOYMENT:**

*Estimate the number of jobs the project would create, move or eliminate. Identify cumulative effects to the employment market.*

The project would be completed in a relatively short time frame and it would not create permanent jobs.

**Proposed Action Alternative:** No lasting impacts to quantity and distribution of employment are anticipated.

**No Action Alternative:** No impacts to quantity and distribution of employment will occur.

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**17. LOCAL AND STATE TAX BASE AND TAX REVENUES:**

*Estimate tax revenue the project would create or eliminate. Identify cumulative effects to taxes and revenue.*

**Proposed Action Alternative:** The project would not have any measurable effects to local or state tax revenues.

**No Action Alternative:** No impacts to the state tax base and/or tax revenues will occur.

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**18. DEMAND FOR GOVERNMENT SERVICES:**

*Estimate increases in traffic and changes to traffic patterns. What changes would be needed to fire protection, police, schools, etc.? Identify cumulative effects of this and other projects on government services*

**Proposed Action Alternative:** The proposal would not have any impacts on traffic or government services.

**No Action Alternative:** No impacts to traffic, road uses, or government services will occur.

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**19. LOCALLY ADOPTED ENVIRONMENTAL PLANS AND GOALS:**

*List State, County, City, USFS, BLM, Tribal, and other zoning or management plans, and identify how they would affect this project.*

DNRC is not aware of other plans or projects in the area.

**Proposed Action Alternative:** No impacts to local environmental plans and goals are anticipated occur.

**No Action Alternative:** No impacts to local environmental plans and goals will occur.

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**20. ACCESS TO AND QUALITY OF RECREATIONAL AND WILDERNESS ACTIVITIES:**

*Identify any wilderness or recreational areas nearby or access routes through this tract. Determine the effects of the project on recreational potential within the tract. Identify cumulative effects to recreational and wilderness activities.*

Legal, public access does exist to this parcel of state land in Section 16, T13N, R4W via Interstate 15, Exit 217. Project implementation may occur during portions of hunting season. Temporary impacts may occur. Generally, hunting opportunities are limited in the project area due to the proximity of ranch infrastructure and the interstate.

**Proposed Action Alternative:** The proposed action is not expected to impact general recreational and wilderness activities on this state tract.

**No Action Alternative:** No impacts to the quality of recreational and wilderness activities will occur.

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**21. DENSITY AND DISTRIBUTION OF POPULATION AND HOUSING:**

*Estimate population changes and additional housing the project would require. Identify cumulative effects to population and housing.*

The proposal does not include any changes to housing or developments.

**Proposed Action Alternative:** The proposal does not include any changes to housing or developments. No direct or cumulative effects to population or housing are anticipated.

**No Action Alternative:** No impacts to the density and/or distribution of population and housing will occur.

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**22. SOCIAL STRUCTURES AND MORES:**

*Identify potential disruption of native or traditional lifestyles or communities.*

**Proposed Action Alternative:** No impacts to the areas social structures, native/traditional lifestyles, or communities are anticipated to occur.

**No Action Alternative:** No impacts social structures, native/traditional lifestyles, or communities will occur.

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**23. CULTURAL UNIQUENESS AND DIVERSITY:**

*How would the action affect any unique quality of the area?*

**Proposed Action Alternative:** No impacts to the areas cultural uniqueness and/or diversity are anticipated to occur.

**No Action Alternative:** No impacts to the areas cultural uniqueness and/or diversity will occur.

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**24. OTHER APPROPRIATE SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC CIRCUMSTANCES:**

*Estimate the return to the trust. Include appropriate economic analysis. Identify potential future uses for the analysis area other than existing management. Identify cumulative economic and social effects likely to occur as a result of the proposed action.*

**Proposed Action Alternative:** The proposed project will facilitate necessary electrical transmission pole replacement in the area. Compensation to the trust beneficiary would total \$600.00 for the land use license. The proposed project would have no lasting, detrimental impacts to the state land. This Land Use License should not impact future uses or income potential to this tract of state trust land.

**No Action Alternative:** No impacts to the social and economic circumstances will occur.

<b>EA Checklist Prepared By:</b>	<b>Name:</b> Andy Burgoyne	<b>Date:</b> December 8, 2017
	<b>Title:</b> HU Manager	

## V. FINDING

### 25. ALTERNATIVE SELECTED:

**Proposed Alternative** – Approve the project as proposed, issue the land use license to allow the proponent to access and utilize the indicated industrial storage area.

### 26. SIGNIFICANCE OF POTENTIAL IMPACTS:

As proposed, the project is not expected to result in any direct, indirect or cumulative adverse effects to the project area. Standard LUL stipulations regarding reclamation and noxious weed control will appear in the license. Compliance with these stipulations will be monitored.

### 27. NEED FOR FURTHER ENVIRONMENTAL ANALYSIS:

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EIS

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More Detailed EA

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No Further Analysis

<b>EA Checklist Approved By:</b>	<b>Name:</b> Martin Balukas
	<b>Title:</b> CLO Trust Land Program Manager
<b>Signature:</b> 	<b>Date:</b> 12 / 7 / 17

**Hilger Valley Staging Area**  
**T13N R4W Section 16**

A. Burgoyne 12/8/17

Project Area

Map showing the Hilger Valley Staging Area, T13N R4W Section 16. The map includes a grid of sections with various numbers (e.g., 01, 02, 03, 04, 05, 06, 07, 08, 09, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31, 32, 33, 34, 35, 36). A blue line indicates the project area, starting from the bottom left and moving towards the top right. A yellow callout box points to the project area with the text "Project Area". The map includes a north arrow and the DNR logo.

ary, Montana Department of Revenue

Exhibit B-Project Map-Topographical



Exhibit C-Project Map-Aerial Photo

